

*a community called ...*

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New Series.]

[No. 198.]

THE  
HIGHER HEROISM.

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NEW YORK:  
PHILLIPS & HUNT.  
CINCINNATI:  
CRANSTON & STOWE.  
1887.



## THE HIGHER HEROISM.

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WHEN Thomas Garfield, the elder brother of James, witnessed, on the occasion of the funeral of the latter, the demonstrations of respect and affection for the late president, he must have recalled with eminent satisfaction the days of his boyhood, his earlier and long-continued struggles to support his widowed mother and younger brother and sisters, and particularly the sacrifice of his own desire for education and advancement that his more gifted brother might have the opportunities which he too craved. The very first small wages which, as a boy of ten or a dozen years, Thomas earned he carried home,

it is related, and threw into his mother's lap, saying, "Now James can have a pair of shoes." Are not the greatest heroisms of life oftentimes the simplest? It were hardly necessary to say that, untimely as had been the death of his distinguished brother, Thomas Garfield must yet have felt that in the great achievements, the noble influence, and the world-wide appreciation of the life so suddenly and prematurely closed, he had lived to reap an abundant reward for those earlier struggles, for his own heroic and most praiseworthy self-denial.

Our excellent, though somewhat abused, word "hero" comes to us from other tongues. It belonged to the Greeks of old. Used by them primarily to designate the wild hordes that overran their country, then for a time applied promiscuously to all the men of an army, it came finally to stand for such as had distinguished themselves; had performed singular deeds of valor in the field.

It is natural for men to aspire after eminence and leadership; to thirst after distinc-

tion, renown; to desire to "read their history in their nation's eyes." This is the usual goal of ambition—not excellency or usefulness, but fame, earthly glory. Nor is it less natural for mankind in general to applaud the hero. If not hoping to be heroes ourselves, we are yet all hero-worshippers. There is something in a display of daring, or an example of genuine intrepidity, which never fails to kindle and charm the imagination. No wonder the gods of antiquity were but deified heroes. The Greeks are said to have worshiped the braves that fell at Marathon.

Mankind has been too much disposed to glorify the heroisms of the battle-field. We would not disparage these. True heroism is essentially unselfish. The patriot hero that sheds his blood for his country is a true hero. How moving the spectacle of that wounded Union soldier, who, having lost his strong right arm, looking steadfastly at the poor, dead member, and with his remaining hand feeling of the cold and clammy fingers, with tearful earnestness said, "Good-by old arm.

We have been a long time together. We must part now. You'll never fire another carbine nor swing another sabre for the country. Yet," said he, addressing himself to those standing by, "understand me: I regret not its loss. It has been torn from my body that not one State should be torn from the Union." But the so-called heroism of the battle-field, however, is ordinarily a comparatively cheap affair. The military hero has every thing to stimulate and to help him—the excitement of the hour, the influence of habit, of discipline, and of public opinion; the intense watching of the country; the eye of his fellows and followers; the march of animated masses; the smell of gunpowder; the anticipated verdict of posterity. Indeed, the truest test of even the soldier's heroism is not so much the actual shock of battle as the toils and fatigues of the long and tedious campaign. Can he "endure hardness?" withstand the effects of cold, heat, hunger? Can he face disease as coolly and fearlessly as a hostile regiment? perish as uncomplainingly in an enemy's

prison-pen as in a blaze of glory on the field of battle? Who during our late war was stirred by the records of any battle scene as by the story of that company of United States soldiers that at Camp Christian so unflinchingly faced the destroying pestilence? Yellow fever was raging among them with dreadful violence and fatal effect. Finally not a single commissioned officer remained. Quietly, calmly, every soldier still remained at the post of duty. Did a nurse sink down and die, promptly another volunteered to step forward and supply his place. Daily, fresh victims fell before the pestilence, but not a man to the last lost his balance of mind or for a moment wavered from his work. Such masterful fearlessness of death and steadfast devotion to duty surpass in moral grandeur, if possible, even that displayed by the British marines when, some years ago, the English ship *Birkenhead* foundered and went down. The vessel was rapidly sinking. There were boats enough to contain only the passengers and crew. Drawn up in line on the ship's

deck, there, calm, still, and shoulder to shoulder, without one mutinous word, the soldiers stood as the vessel sank deeper and deeper beneath the waves. Their last act consisted in firing a volley of musketry as a salute to the last boat load of passengers as it pushed away—the same serving withal as a salute to the grim conqueror Death, now charging upon them with his legions of white-wreathed waves.

Meantime "peace hath her victories no less renowned than war." He that hazards life to rescue a fellow-being from a burning building or a watery grave, or to snatch him from any impending peril, is as true a hero as a Nelson or a Lawrence. The annals of the sea are illustrated by many an instance of high heroism. Many of the present generation still remember the particulars of the heroic death of that gallant sailor, Captain Herndon, father-in-law of the late ex-President Arthur. It was the theme of poetry and song at the time it happened, as exhibiting the highest type of manhood, and twenty-five years have



by no means sufficed to throw the veil of oblivion over the touching scene of his death. Although a captain in the United States navy, Herndon was permitted to take service in the line of steamers then running from New York to Panama. He left New York in command of the *Central America*, crowded with passengers. Off the coast she was wrecked. Captain Herndon knew she would sink. With a coolness perfectly characteristic of the man, he made arrangements to save all his passengers and crew. He found a place for each and every one but himself, for the boats, loaded down, threatened to sink. Handing his watch to a New York friend entering the boats, he asked him to deliver it to his wife, and the boats were pushed off. Dressing himself in his naval uniform, and girding on his sword, he ascended to the highest part of the vessel and took position. Thus dressed, and under the flag of his country, the last thing the fleeing passengers saw was Herndon, the flag, and the ship all going down together into the quiet deep.

This scene is no less dramatic than touching. We are to guard, however, against the impression that the gallant Herndon's conduct in this case was really any more truly heroic than that of the humble, unnamed passenger on the same ill-fated vessel, who, having with his expiring energies laid hold upon a floating piece of furniture, only to find, to his dismay, that it was already bearing up two little children, and that hence it was insufficient to bear his added weight, instantly relaxed his hold, and throwing up his hands, sank to rise no more. The unalloyed heroism of this act is worthy of being compared with that of the old woman who, on the occasion of the more recent wreck of the steamer *Narragansett* on Long Island Sound, to some men who were exerting themselves to the utmost to rescue the passengers, said, "Never mind me; I am old. Save the young." That was a most affecting instance of this order of heroism afforded by the nine-year old boy who, sinking beneath the waters for the third time, and struggling with death, said to the only re-

maining brother, who was about to plunge in and attempt his rescue, "Don't come in, Jimmie, or father will lose all his boys at once."

A very impressive illustration of our theme is afforded in the melancholy fate of five seamen who, in December, 1886, off a dangerous coast and on a place known as Five Fathom Bank, sacrificed their lives in a gallant attempt to rescue a distressed vessel from shipwreck. What story, truly, in all the annals of heroic daring, more thrilling than the following:

"The first officer of the Cromwell Line steamship *Knickerbocker*, Captain B. J. Henry, and four seamen—John Johnson, George Harris, William Mitgaten, and Frederic Johnson—volunteered to fetch a line from the schooner *Mary D. Cranmer*, then in imminent danger of driving ashore. The gallant little crew reached the schooner, got the end of a hawser, and set out to return to the steamer through a wicked and increasing cross sea. The life-boat which they manned was capsized again and again, and repeatedly they

righted her and resumed the desperate struggle. The weather was bitter cold, and the water with which the poor fellows were drenched froze on them, while the stinging spray, freezing as it fell, momentarily added to the weight of their icy armor. They had nearly reached the *Knickerbocker* when a more tremendous sea than ever overwhelmed the boat, and when it passed away the strength of the long-buffed men was exhausted, and they drowned before the eyes of their helpless comrades."

A New York daily pays the following tribute to these "martyrs to duty:"

"In these days of lax performance of duties, when so many minds are fixed on the securing of rights, and so few upon the fulfillment of obligations, a deed of simple heroism like this deserves to be noted and pondered. These five seamen were in no way urged or compelled to risk their lives. They volunteered for the service of danger. Their only incitement was the peril of some unknown fellow-creatures. They knew that if the wind

held as it was, and the schooner was not assisted, she would go ashore, and all on board her must be lost. This knowledge inspired them to put their own lives in jeopardy, and, as the event shows, to sacrifice them. We may be sure too that what nerved them for the prolonged battle with wind and wave on their return trip was far less concern for themselves than consideration of the fact that upon their exertions depended the rescue of the schooner's crew. The odds against them were too heavy, and they failed; but they died gloriously in the performance of the highest duty laid upon humanity, and the moral of their heroism is one which needs no special application."

"Captain Henry and his crew," said an official of the line in whose service he laid down his life, "are as great heroes as any who have won the applause of the world on the battlefield. They went to rescue the schooner voluntarily, well knowing that the chances were greatly against their surviving, but scorning to leave fellow-beings in distress."

We will not disparage physical courage. No one can respect a coward. Yet it will not be denied, probably, that the streets of any city in Christendom can, from even its most debased and brutal populations, furnish almost any number of men who, with a brief training, may become fierce soldiers, ready to leap the ramparts of any Malakoff or Redan, as regardless of shot and shell as if they were but paper pellets. But moral courage is quite a different virtue. An unsophisticated, virtuous boy leaves his parental home for the perils and temptations of school or of business. He has received from his mother a Bible; he has promised that he will read it daily, with prayer. Night comes. In his dormitory he is surrounded by the profane, the ribald, the scorner. Nevertheless, with the calm heroism of another Daniel, the boy takes out his Bible, reads a few verses, and then and there, regardless of scoffs and jeers, kneels by the side of his cot and offers a short and silent prayer. This is *moral* courage. This is the battle that tries a man's soul, the

test of character that decides whether the spirit be of earthly or of celestial mold. We do not hesitate to affirm that you may find ten thousand men with a certain bull-dog recklessness of danger where you can find one man endowed with this higher, Christian heroism—this virtue of seraphic fiber, this seal of Heaven's own nobility, the courage, truly, of Milton's Abdiel,

“—faithful found, among the faithless,  
Faithful only he”—

Formerly the Christian soldier had occasion for the exercise of physical as well as moral courage, braving the terrors of the dungeon, the lion's den, the scaffold, the stake—the doom of martyrdom. At present, however, it is moral courage chiefly he is called upon to practice—a virtue as much more rarely exhibited as it is more difficult to realize. Why is it that while, with sufficient money, any government may easily enlist men who will, fearless as wolves, rush through ditch and over rampart, and up to the cannon's mouth

on any field of blood, when, on the other hand, God sends his recruiting agents out into the world to engage soldiers for the Cross, thousands are afraid to enlist? What do they fear? That cavalry will trample them down; that shells will blow them into the air; that canister and grape will tear them limb from limb? Do they fear the toilsome march, the rain-drenched bivouac, the dreary hospital? Nothing of the kind. What then? It is opinion; it's "the speech of people." It's the sneer, the blast of ridicule, the curling lip of scorn: this it is that is dreaded. Does any one wish to test this courage himself? Are you the father of a family, and have never established a family altar? Begin to-night. Gather wife and children about you; open the Bible; read a few verses; lead them in prayer, imploring God's forgiveness and blessing. There are scores of men who would prefer to lead a forlorn hope rather than do this.

Are you a young man? Say frankly to your associates, "I am resolved henceforth



to try to live a Christian life." Go to the prayer-meeting. Openly avow there your resolution. Ask others to join you in your heavenward journey. Does this seem to you a task not specially difficult? Yet there are multitudes of young men who would rather head a charge against some frowning battle-mmented fortress than to perform this simple act of Christian heroism.

And this is the "higher heroism:" always to "dare to do right, to dare to be true," to dare to obey the voice of conscience and of duty regardless of consequences. He is the ideal hero who, Daniel-like, Paul-like,

*"Dares do aught save wrong;  
Fears nothing mortal but to be unjust;  
Who is not blown up with the flattering trust  
Of spongy sycophants; who stands unmoved  
Despite the jostling of opinion."*